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PREFACE

THIS volume is the first of a series giving the results of work carried out in the years 1914 and 1915 in the Small Islands off the north-east coast of Malekula in the New Hebrides, one of the chain of Melanesian archipelagos stretching from New Guinea to Fiji and lying roughly parallel to the north-east coast of Australia at a distance of some 1000 miles. I had intended to make a longer stay, but the Great War intervened, and since then a number of circumstances have combined to prevent earlier publication. Choice of the Small Islands as a useful place to carry out field-work was due partly to the fact that a previously planned expedition to New Guinea in company with Dr. Haddon had fallen through, and partly to the influence of the late Dr. W. H. R. Rivers, who had just finished his *History of Melanesian Society* and wished to take the opportunity afforded by the meeting of the British Association in Australia in the summer of 1914, which we both attended, to continue the study of Melanesia, and asked me to go with him. At that time great interest was being aroused by theories of megalithic migration into the Pacific. Codrington had already called attention to the stone-work on Gaua in the Banks Islands. Though the culture responsible for the erection of those monuments had long disappeared, new evidence had, however, just come to light of a living megalithic culture through the publication by Dr. (now Professor) Felix Speiser of the results of an expedition to the Northern New Hebrides, where he recorded the existence of numerous megalithic monuments such as dolmens and monoliths still being erected by the natives in the course of their rites.

One of the chief centres of this megalithic culture was the group of small coral islets called the Small Islands already mentioned. It was therefore to these that, with the kind assistance of Mr. (later Sir) Merton King, then Resident Commissioner, Rivers and I eventually made our way. Rivers, however, after staying about a week, left for a Mission station on the island of Tangoa off the south coast of Santo, and I never saw him again in the islands save for a brief meeting on his way home. I stayed behind on one of the Small Islands called Atchin, where my chief field-work was carried out.

It soon became clear that the culture of these islands was far from simple, and that, on account of their situation midway between two main cultural areas, as well as of their favourable climatic position, they were a meeting-place where much culture contact had occurred, and was indeed still taking place. The instability resulting from this contact showed itself most clearly with regard to the two main elements of culture in these islands, namely in the matter of kinship, in which considerable changes were taking place, leading to not infrequent wars

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177 on account of new influences affecting the regulation of marriage, and
121 above all in the megalithic ritual, new forms of which were constantly being acquired from further south.

121 Expeditions to other islands confirmed this initial impression of a
184 northward movement of culture, and it was for this reason that, as part of an effort to establish a historical sequence of cultures, I turned my attention to the most northerly islet of this group, namely Vao. There I found an earlier form of kinship structure in which, despite the uniformly patrilocal nature of all Small Island culture, the matrilineal element received more overt expression than in those islets further south where patrilineal influence is being constantly reinforced by the same cultural drift as is responsible for the new forms of megalithic ritual. The same matrilineal element also dominated the mortuary rites, showing that these also belonged to an older layer of culture than those in the remaining Small Islands. It is for this reason that, despite the fact that my main field-work was carried out on Atchin, I propose to devote this first volume to Vao in order to supply a firm historical basis for the accounts to be given in later volumes of the more recent developments of megalithic culture in this region.

122 For hospitality during my visits to Vao, where I did not, as on Atchin, live in native quarters, I am indebted to the kindness and real friendship of Père Jamond of the Marist Mission, at that time Roman Catholic priest on that island, where he had lived alone for over nine years. Our first meeting had been one of unveiled hostility on his part, since he had heard exaggerated accounts of my performances in native dances on Atchin, of which he severely disapproved. But once that little difficulty had been overcome and he recognised a fellow-student of native culture, our friendship quickly ripened, and he was indeed the only white man in the islands with whom I felt I could speak about native matters on equal terms. He was a keen philologist, spoke Vao well (which he described as being "*aussi beau que le français*"), and had compiled a considerable dictionary of the language. His flock, however, was small, consisting for the most part of a few old men and young children, and the majority of the population was quite untouched by Mission influence, the natives of all the Small Islands having at that time, despite the presence of Missions of several denominations, for the most part definitely turned their faces against any form of Christianity. Nevertheless, owing to his humour and understanding and quite obvious sincerity, the natives regarded him with affection, and in cases of trouble with white men, not only the natives of Vao but even those from other islands ostensibly belonging to other Missions often sought his aid.

While fully conscious of the pitfalls attending a comparatively short stay under such conditions, these were, however, considerably minimised by the fact that, as known to the Vao natives, I had lived half a year